

EULOGY FOR JUAN DE LA CRUZ*

DELIVERED BY CESAR CHAVEZ, AUGUST 21, 1973, ARVIN, CA.

We are here to honor the life of Juan de la Cruz. On behalf of his wife, his son and his family, we speak to all those who mourn here and throughout the country. Juan de la Cruz was a simple and a good man. He is gone and we miss him and yet he is alive in our respect and love for his life. He was a humble farm worker and yet in his dying thousands of people have come to pay honor to his life. What is it about the life of our brother, Juan, that produces such a response in us?

Last night as we walked in a candlelight procession through Arvin I was thinking about the earliest days of our union. I remember with strong feelings the families who joined our movement and paid dues long before there was any hope of winning contracts. Sometimes, fathers and mothers would take money out of their meager food budgets just because they believed that farm workers could and must build their own union. I remember thinking then that with spirit like that...we had to win. No force on earth could stop us.

Juan de la Cruz is part of that spirit. He joined the union in its earliest days. He could have held back. He could have waited to see which side was going to win. Instead he threw himself into our struggle with DiGiorgio Corp. He picketed. He worked on the boycott. He went to jail. He did not hold back. He gave himself completely so that all farm workers might some day be free.

It is hard to turn your back on such a person. His example of service and sacrifice reaches the spirit of each one of us. His life and his deeds of love pull on our best instincts and cause us to want to give something of ourselves.

Juan has not only given himself in life — but he has now given his only life on this earth for us, for his children and for all farm workers who suffer and who go hungry in this land of plenty. We are here because his spirit of service and sacrifice has touched and moved our lives. The force that is generated by that spirit of love is more powerful than any force on earth. It cannot be stopped.

We live in the midst of people who hate and fear us. They have worked hard to keep us in our place. They will spend millions more to destroy our union. But we do not have to make ourselves small by hating and fearing them in return. There is enough love and goodwill in our movement to give energy to our struggle and still have plenty left over to break down and change the climate of hate and fear around us.

We are going to win. It is just a matter of time. And when we win there will be a strong and vital service center and hiring hall and field office in the Lamont-Arvin area. It seems only fitting and proper that our union office here be named in honor of Juan de la Cruz.

Juan de la Cruz has not given his life in vain. He will not be forgotten. His spirit will live in each one of us who decides to join the struggle and who gives love and strength to others. Juan is a martyr in a just cause. We will give purpose and memory to his life and death by what we do. The more we sacrifice, the harder we work, the more life we give to the spirit of our brother, Juan de la Cruz.

*Señor de la Cruz was shot and killed on a United Farm Worker picket line, August 17, 1973. He was 60 years old.